

VZCZCXRO2517
OO RUEHBW RUEHGA RUEHHA RUEHIK RUEHPOD RUEHQU RUEHVC RUEHYG
DE RUEHOT #0603 1211952
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 301952Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7771
INFO RUCNCAN/ALL CANADIAN POSTS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0181

UNCLAS OTTAWA 000603

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CA](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON AFGHANISTAN BEGINS WORK

REF: A. OTTAWA 373

[1](#)B. OTTAWA 521

[1](#)1. (SBU) PolMinCouns on April 29 met with chairman Pierre Lemieux (Conservative, Ontario) of the House of Commons' new "Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan," established under the terms of the March 13 bipartisan motion extending the mandate of the Canadian Forces in Kandahar until 2011 (ref a). He congratulated Lemieux on his selection on April 15 by the 13 committee members, who include the Parliamentary Secretaries for Defence, Foreign Affairs, and Public Security on the Conservative side, as well as official "Critics" (Shadow Ministers) for Defence and Foreign Affairs on the Liberal side, as well as the New Democratic Party's critic for Defence and the Bloc Quebecois' critics for Defence and Foreign Affairs. Lemieux admitted that it will be tricky for the Special Committee to navigate a useful path that does not overlap unduly with the work of the National Defence Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee, especially given the sometimes overlapping memberships. He noted, for example, that the National Defence Committee had already planned a trip in early summer to Afghanistan, and said that Special Committee members would have to defer their own initial travel to country of their exclusive focus until at least fall 2008, in order not to overload the people on the ground in Kandahar. He added that the Special Committee's first travel would likely instead be to Washington sometime over the summer. PolMinCouns offered to provide all possible assistance in ensuring a good program of meetings with the U.S. Congress as well as Administration officials. Lemieux expressed warm appreciation.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Lemieux said that the Special Committee would kick off its substantive work with a hearing on May 1 featuring the new Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Afghanistan Kai Eide, who is in Ottawa on April 30 and May 1. (According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Eide will also meet with members of the new Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan, including its chairman Minister of International Trade David Emerson, Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier, Defence Minister Peter MacKay, Minister of Public Security Stockwell Day, and Minister of International Cooperation Bev Oda.) Lemieux said that the Special Committee was still finalizing its plans for future meetings, which will thereafter take place on Wednesday evenings between 6:30 and 8:30, a time Lemieux said the Special Committee had picked explicitly to ensure a televised hearing room and wider coverage. His goal is to use these weekly televised sessions to get as much information to the public as possible about what Canada and the international community were doing in Afghanistan and to point to progress on both military and developmental fronts, in order to counteract public doubts that the mission had any genuine hope of succeeding. He noted that public pride in the Canadian Forces remains high, in large part due to the

leadership of outgoing Chief of Defence Staff General Rick Hillier (ref b). He expressed the hope that, as the public learned more about what was actually happening on the ground in Kandahar beyond the bad news that the media chose to report, overall support for the mission would increase.

13. (SBU) Comment: Keeping the Liberals on board in support of the Afghan Mission is important to the minority Conservative government, and the initial dynamics within the new Special Committee seem to bode well. Mission Canada will work hard to maintain close and productive contacts with Special Committee members (the DCM will host a lunch for Liberal Foreign Affairs Critic Bob Rae on May 13), and will notify the Department as soon as the Special Committee pins down its travel dates to Washington.

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